



The case for socialism

A ***Socialist
Worker***
pamphlet



The Case for Socialism

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We deserve a better world

This pamphlet is based on John Rees' *The ABC of Socialism*, published in 1994 by the Socialist Workers Party (Britain). The Socialist Workers Movement in publishing this Irish version has taken the opportunity to substantially re-write much of the text and add new sections to address an Irish audience

We live in a world that makes excuses for poverty, misery and disease.

In 1994 India was affected by a plague which led to many deaths. This plague was a variant of the "Black Death" or bubonic plague that struck down medieval Europe and was highly contagious. It might seem that the return of plague is simply unfortunate, a result of natural conditions. Perhaps India's climate or geography meant that the outbreak of this disaster was no more avoidable than earthquakes or volcanos?

But there is nothing natural about the conditions which have allowed plague to return. Surat, the most affected city, is extremely impoverished. One and a half million people live there, half of them crammed into shanty towns surrounded by rubbish tips and open sewers. Conditions like these are a breeding ground for plague-carrying rats. As well as living in these miserable and dangerous circumstances, the people of India have to endure their government's cuts in health care.

Hospitals in Bombay and New Delhi should have had ample stocks of an antibiotic which reduces the risk of death from the plague. Instead, lack of resources meant that they rapidly ran out of stocks when the plague broke out. Doctors were helpless in their efforts to stop the plague spreading.



If you look deeper still at the situation, and ask why there is so much poverty in India, again you find that it is not for any natural reason.

Two hundred years ago agriculture in India was strong. The country exported metalwork and textiles to China, North Africa and Europe. That was before the arrival of the British Empire. The British rulers saw India as a reservoir which they could plunder at will to build up capitalism in their country. They imposed land-lords on India to collect rural taxes. Indian goods were taxed to push them out of British markets, while British goods moved freely in India. The value of native production collapsed. The percentage of the population relying on the land increased, their soil became exhausted and hunger stalked the country as never before.

This is not just an historical tragedy. Capitalism continues to devastate whole parts of the globe. Today the development of many countries, poorer even than India, is retarded by the insistent demand for interest payments to the world banks.

For every £1 in aid that is sent to Africa to relieve famine or encourage development projects, £2 comes back to the Western banking system in interest payments.

The pursuit of profit has had a devastating impact on the lives of most of the world's population and continues to do so. Across the world cholera, malaria and TB—all poverty related diseases—are on the rise. Yet at the same time, the world's resources are greater than ever.

The UN's Human Development Report for 1994 shows the true scale of the devastation that capitalism causes. One billion people do not have access to safe water because they are too poor. In fact the combined income of half the world's population is \$815bn. This sounds like a lot—until you discover that this is precisely the same figure that is spent on arms by ruling elites around the world. In other words, by stopping the production of devices specialising in exploding,

melting, poisoning and ripping apart human beings, we could double the income of half the people on the planet.

The politicians and the Western media no longer try to justify this situation. They simply claim that 'socialism could never work'. They try to pretend that there is no alternative to their system based on greed and profit.

But all ruling elites in the past have done the same. The Greek philosopher, Plato, thought that slavery was the most natural form of existence for ordinary mortals and that there was no alternative to it. Daniel O'Connell, the upper class Irish patriot, opposed legislation to stop children under the age of 12 working down the mines. He claimed that there no alternative to child labour if society was to survive.

Plato and O'Connell were wrong. Different ways of organising society were found to replace those they regarded as the most natural forms. It shows that we should never let our rulers get away with the argument that there are no realistic alternatives to them. Today we live in a world where humans have more potential than ever before. For the first time there is the possibility that the wealth produced by our work could be directed to liberating humanity from poverty and disease. It is worth looking at ways in which this can be done.

Although the situation in Ireland is nowhere near as bad as in the poorest countries of the world, the need for socialism is as clear here as anywhere. Ireland may not have a Royal Family to parade as an example of parasitism and privilege, but it does have a "Golden Circle" of fantastically wealthy business owners, and politicians who do their bidding,

These people have been helping themselves to wealth created by workers. In Northern Ireland, a millionaire like Eddie Haughey, who has been decorated by the British state and made a member of the Irish Senate, earns £739,000 as head of Norbrook Labs. But the same man has set out to attack unions and pay his

employees low wages.

Or look at the way that the tax system works in Southern Ireland.. Income to the government from inheritance tax makes up just 2% of all taxes. Corporation tax on profits is just 2.6% of all taxes. In 1994, £735 million was collected in Corporation tax. This compares with £2,786 million paid by PAYE workers.

The Beef scandal gave a small glimpse of how this Golden Circle works. Larry Goodman is one of Ireland's major capitalists who controls much of the meat industry. Goodman has paid more to the Fianna Fail party in donations than he has to the state in taxes. Throughout the 1980s he only paid 1% of his tax bill. Yet his company received preferential treatment from the Government and, in particular, Albert Reynolds when he was the Taoiseach. After a public outcry which followed an ITV World in Action documentary, the government was forced to set up a Tribunal to report on the beef industry. They managed to spend a staggering £35 million on legal fees for a report which ended up as a complete whitewash. Just by pure coincidence the author of the report, Judge Hamilton was later appointed Chief Justice on a salary of over £95,000 a year.

Today Goodman is back in charge of his beef company, under a new name—Irish Food Processors. Not only has he got away with massive tax evasion, he and his fellow businessmen are expecting a massive hand-out from the state to cover the hundreds of millions of pounds debt built up by Goodman International.

Contrast the situation of the rich and powerful in Ireland with that of workers. We have massive unemployment, the longest working hours in Europe and pay the highest level of taxes.

Whenever workers step out of line the courts and police are used to their full extent. No one has ever been to jail for tax evasion here, despite the fact that it is estimated to cost the government £2,500 million. But refuse to pay the water charges and you are threatened with having your water cut off.

Or take the case of eighteen year old Jonathan Byrne. He was given a seven day jail sentence for not paying the correct fare on a number 45 Dublin bus. The contrast between how he was treated and the state's protection of the powerful shows how sharp the division between rich and poor is in Ireland.

Socialists are out to end this injustice. We believe in smashing the Golden Circle and pouring wealth into creating jobs, health care, housing—in other words in satisfying people's wants.

Workers

Why the working class?

People become socialists because they want to end poverty, injustice, exploitation and oppression. But how can this be done?

The rich seem to have endless resources to protect their power. In the board rooms of both Irish and multi-national firms they make decisions about how production is to be organised and where jobs are to be located. They can blackmail governments by threatening to move their production elsewhere. They decide how many workers will be employed, what wages they will be paid and how long the working day will be.

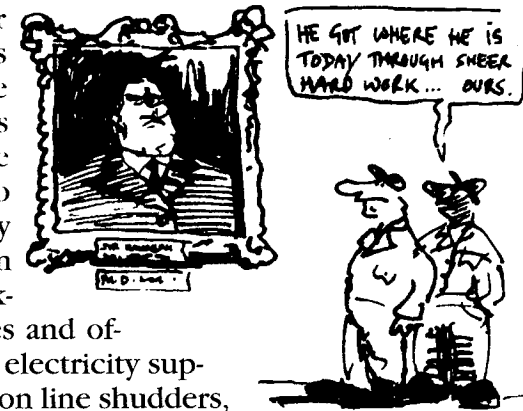
But the rich own more than just factories and offices. They also own the media which flatters their achievements and gives their view on the world. Four out of five newspapers sold in the Republic of Ireland on a Sunday are controlled by one millionaire, Tony O'Reilly. He owns the Irish Independent, Evening Herald, Sunday World and has a powerful stake in the Irish Press group and the Sunday Tribune. O'Reilly never lets his newspapers be used to attack the privileges which his class enjoys. Instead his press will denounce workers who dare go on strike to better their conditions as people who 'are holding the country to ransom'.

The wealthy are more than merely a group of individuals with a lot of money. They use the resources they control to shape ideas and gain political power. They have a shared interest that is opposed to those of other groups within society. Together ownership and power, and the common values and wealth that make these possible, mean the rich form a ruling class.

But for all the power of the ruling class, there is one group in society whose power is potentially as great. This comprises the vast majority of people who cannot survive unless they sell their labour in return for a wage. Without worker's labour, in the factories and offices, nothing moves. The electricity supply can stop, the production line shudders, the computer screen goes blank. This is the great weakness of the ruling class. They may own great factories, offices, shops and banks—but without us these properties are empty hulks. Without us the great money making machines of the rich stand idle.

Some people say that the working class is shrinking. But the opposite is true. In 1951, 38% of the Irish labour force were farmers or relatives assisting farmers. These have now declined to less than 15% of the workforce. Today there are three times as many trade union members in Ireland as there were in 1945. This huge workforce is composed of both manual and white collar workers.

The press often pretend that the latter group are 'middle class' and have no common interest with the rest of the labour movement. But a nurse or an office worker also have to sell their labour to survive, they cannot exert control over the jobs they do, they can be fired by their employers. The conditions which white collar workers face have changed dramatically in the past two decades. In the 1960s, getting a job in the bank was regarded as a great privilege. You had to 'get the call' and promise loyalty and dedication to the banks. In return you were guaranteed high wages, promotion prospects, pensions and decent holidays. Now new workers in the banks are on pathetically low wages. They are often on 'contract' with no promise of a pension. This type of change helps to explain why



white collar workers make up the largest category of new recruits into the unions.

Not only is the working class still with us, but it is also still fighting. Indeed the history of the twentieth century is punctuated with great revolutionary outbursts by workers: the 1905 revolution in Russia, the two great revolutions of 1917 in Russia, the German Revolution of 1918, the British General Strike of 1926, the Spanish Revolution of 1936, the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, the Czechoslovakian uprising and French general strike of 1968, the Portuguese Revolution of 1974, the rise of Solidarity in Poland in 1981—to mention some of the most famous. Even the 1989 East European revolutions, especially in Romania and Czechoslovakia, would have been impossible without workers struggles.

In Ireland, there have been huge waves of working class struggle. Despite the sectarian divisions in Northern Ireland, there have been big struggles among nurses, firefighters and others. Between 1979 and 1981, there was an intense burst of militancy in the South. Workers in factories such as Clondalkin Paper Mills and Ranks Flour Mills occupied their factories to protest against redundancies. When some of them were jailed under the Forcible Entry Act there were solidarity strikes throughout Dublin. Hundreds of thousands took to the streets in the great PAYE marches to demand that big business and the larger farmers pay a fair share of taxation. The movement only went down because the union leaders in the ICTU engaged in intense manoeuvres to get the protests called off. From 1987 onwards the union leaders claimed that they were in a 'social partnership' with the government and the employers. But the 'partnership' did not stop the employers pushing for more redundancies and even wage cuts.

There will be plenty more struggles in the future because capitalism is a system which drives workers to fight back. This is how:

To survive, each boss has to avoid being beaten by their competitors. So every capitalist tries to get

their workers to work longer and harder than their rivals. Competition forces each individual capitalist to attack the jobs, wages and conditions of workers. Because this pattern is repeated in every firm it results in a struggle between the whole class of capitalists and workers.

Inevitably workers resist because their livelihood is at risk. They form unions, protest and go on strike as they have done since capitalism's early days. Sometimes such revolts are small and local, sometimes they assume the scale of a general strike or a revolution. So just as the ruling class try, day in and day out, to weaken the workers movement, socialists seek to defend and strengthen it.

No other group in society, no other class, has the same power to defeat the ruling class or the same interest in seeing the ruling class defeated. No other group can stop the flow of wealth to the ruling class and paralyse the institutions of government, simply by stopping work. No other group has the same level of organisation or the same history of continuous struggle against the system.

How do ideas change?

Workers have the power to make a revolution—but will they use it? Certainly a revolution will never happen until large numbers of workers are convinced of the need for it. The success of a revolution depends on it being 'a movement of the immense majority, in the interests of the immense majority' as Karl Marx and Frederick Engels wrote in the Communist Manifesto. Yet most workers, most of the time are far from revolutionary. It is important for socialists to argue and to try to convince others of their ideas. But arguing with individuals or even getting people to read a revolutionary paper like Socialist Worker may convince an important minority—but not the majority.

Fortunately, the actual experiences which many workers have, can politicise them long before they meet a revolutionary socialist.

Consider what, at a minimum, happens when workers strike. The mind numbing tedium of the daily routine is shattered. No longer told what to do, when to do it, how fast to work, strikers begin to take their lives into their own hands. They have to learn to organise, to make decisions on the tactics which are the best to win. Instead of being isolated from one another and made to feel they are a tiny cog in a big machine, workers begin to see that, collectively, they are very powerful. Their confidence begins to rise.

Perhaps initially the strikers may believe that as soon as the boss hears their case, as soon as the manager listens to reason, the union will be able to achieve some of its demands. Strikers may start by thinking that the press will report their strike fairly and that the police and courts will act in an unbiased fashion. The direct experience of generations of strikers have taught them differently: wage cuts or sackings do not happen because the bosses are ill informed or because they make illogical judgements—but because of the need to make a profit and avoid being forced into bankruptcy by their competitors. So they are unlikely to be moved simply through hearing the union's case. Workers soon find out the press are not neutral—that, typically, they pick on the highest earnings (including overtime) of one group of workers and present them as the average in order to show them as 'greedy'.

The courts and the police are also biased and the law on industrial relations is stacked against workers. Obviously, the bigger the dispute the more deeply the ideas of those involved will be transformed. An overtime ban in a small workplace will not have the same impact as the Miners Strike in Britain in 1984-85. A strike that is lost will not radicalise to the same extent as a strike that ends in victory.

Strikes can often transform workers ideas faster and more completely than anything else—but they are not the only way by which lots of people become politicised. A student occupation can allow those involved draw important lessons about the difference between

rhetoric and action. Taking part in a rent strike or a boycott of water charges can show people the importance of solidarity. Opposing harassment from the RUC, the British Army or the Gardai can show how the state really functions despite its pretence at democracy. Campaigning against racists or standing up to the bigots in Irish society who want to deny women's rights can also be an important starting point for seeing why the system as a whole has to be opposed.

The more directly people are involved in these struggles, the more they can be politicised. But the beginnings of a change in consciousness can be under way even before people get involved in anything. To see politicians preach about the need for sacrifice and then spent thousands on their own offices; to see miscarriages of justice in both Britain and Ireland; to see rising famines in a world where there is plenty of food, can all begin the process of politicisation. The contradictions which the system throws up force their way into the minds of people who might not think themselves political at all.

"Workers become political when they have to fight the government for a crust of bread" said the Russian revolutionary, Vladimir Lenin. He did not mean that workers must be literally starving before they begin to think of revolution. He meant that when the most basic necessities—a job, a decent wage, a place to live, decent health and education systems—are denied to workers and they have to fight, not just in this factory or that town, but throughout the country, then political consciousness begins to take root. That consciousness grows most quickly when workers not only have a burning desire to put a stop to all the bad things that are happening in their lives, but when they also begin to take action to do something about realising their desires.

Then they begin to see what is wrong with society, how all the forces of the ruling class—the press, police, government—act against them. And, as the organisational strength of workers grows, so they be-

come more confident and imaginative in their ideas about the possibility of socialism. The capacity to think more daring thoughts grows out of every act of solidarity, every strike that is won, every campaign that succeeds, every bigot who is humiliated. Then the path is open for socialist arguments to find an audience of millions instead of thousands, a path opened by workers direct experience of class society and the reality of struggle against it.

Unions

Why socialists are trade unionists

Workers can only use their strength if they unite—and that requires organisation.

Capitalism itself lays the basis for that organisation. It brings workers together in big workplaces and cities. They work side by side and share similar living standards. But to make gains workers have to form unions. These started in Britain 200 years ago when skilled workers began to establish 'combinations'. In Ireland, the majority of workers started to be won to unions through the great struggles of Connolly and Larkin to build the Irish Transport and General Workers Union (now SIPTU).

Union organisation was, and is, a great step forward. To see what a difference it makes, you have only to compare the situation in Ireland to that in the USA. More than half the Irish workforce are in unions compared to only 15% in America. But since the mid seventies, wages in the US have fallen by around 17%. There have been attacks on wages throughout Ireland—but the wage cuts have not gone so deep because of the existence of union organisation.

Anyone who has worked in a non-union workplace knows how confident the bosses are: how they alter hours and wages at will; and victimise anyone who objects; how they cut corners on health and safety and sack people without notice. Being in a union, by contrast, makes workers more confident. They can force management to deal with their collective grievances rather than having individual wage settlements where workers are pitted against each other. They can elect shop stewards and be represented by officials

who negotiate on their behalf with management. They have an organisation with funds and links with other workers so that if they take action they have a chance of practical solidarity. In a union workers learn how to argue politically and reach democratic decisions. They begin to see each other as a class, to see they have more in common with other workers than with the boss or the government.

The task of the union is to secure the things that every worker wants—good wages, safe conditions, decent hours. It needs to organise around issues which all workers have in common. Its strength is that it unites all workers, no matter what their political views are.

But this strength can also be a weakness, especially when it comes to anything more than fighting to defend wages and conditions. Unions fight for better conditions under capitalism, not to end capitalism itself. They demand that the bosses give pay increases—but they do not oppose the whole profit making machine. They want a bigger slice of the cake, not the whole bakery.

In some disputes, this weakness may not be decisive. Workers can win disputes for particular claims or stop victimisation even while believing there will always be bosses. But there are other times when disputes escalate to a point where union organisation is not enough. Why not?

Disputes like the great 1913 lock-out or the miners strike in Britain in 1984-85 started off over relatively simple economic issues. But the implication of a defeat or victory for one side meant that much more was at stake. The battle in 1913 was really about which class would be strong in an independent Ireland. William Martin Murphy and the employers were absolutely determined that there would not be strong unions in a country that had its own Home Rule Parliament. Similarly if the British miners had beaten Thatcher, then the whole balance of forces in the 1980s would have swung in favour of the working class.

When the stakes are so high, the employers and

the government realise that they are not dealing with purely economic issues. They throw everything into winning a strike. They mobilise the police, and even the army, to break a strike. They change laws and encourage scabbing. They sense that the whole structure of their society is under question. At such times, if the working class does not go beyond simple trade unionism and develop a political strategy which can answer the question, “Who should run society, workers or capitalists?”, they will be at a massive disadvantage. In these intense conflicts thousands of workers sense the need for a political alternative. This is why, when the ruling class feel threatened and fight with all their determination, a revolutionary socialist organisation is required to confront the bosses and beat them.

But it is not just in the big disputes that political organisation can be decisive. In almost every dispute union officials and Labour Party TDs will recommend making compromises with the employer. They will urge workers to go to the Labour Court or seek to ‘win public opinion’ by being moderate. They will counsel workers to stick to the letter of the law—no matter how unjust those laws are. This approach can often be disastrous. In a key dispute in Wexford, workers who fought for the right to join the SIPTU union at Nolan’s Transport were told by their officials not to seek blacking of the company because it was against the law. But after two years of behaving in the most moderate manner possible, the courts finally banned the strike on spurious grounds.

Revolutionary socialists will approach strikes differently. They will stress the strengths of workers themselves. They will press for effective picketing and solidarity. They will try to organise collections from other workplaces. When necessary they will advocate ignoring or breaking anti-union laws. The union leader or the Labour TD who sees no further than capitalism often advocates tactics which mean we fight with hands tied behind our backs. A revolutionary socialist who urges workers to dare to run society itself, will always

stress militancy and self activity as the key to winning the simplest of strikes.

Why do the union leaders sell out?

Why do the union leaders pretend that the employers are their 'partners'? Why did the President of the ICTU denounce the workers at TEAM as dinosaurs and 'troglodytes' when they were defending their conditions? Why did union leaders tell Packard workers to accept a deal which increased their working week by two hours?

The union leaders of today do everything to distance themselves from the tradition of Connolly and Larkin. Instead they urge workers to co-operate with their employers and to compete against fellow workers, whether in Ireland or elsewhere.

One reason why union leaders are like this is the nature of the unions themselves. A strong union is a relatively stable, well organised institution. It necessarily has structures and routines built up over time. In all but exceptional circumstances, most of its members, most of the time, will not be engaged in any industrial action. This inevitably produces inertia at all levels. But the union leaders embody this conservatism much more fully than the grassroots.

An ordinary union member will take industrial action sometimes. The full time official never takes action. The wages and conditions of the ordinary workers can sometimes depend on the ability of the union to sustain long strikes. But the union official sees this type of action as a drain on the union's finances. The officials, who are paid by the union, are fearful of anything which disrupts the normal bureaucratic functioning of the union, particularly if there is a legal or financial risk involved.

The union officials come to lead a life which is different, and superior, to the life of ordinary workers. They no longer work the same hours and shifts, are no longer dependent on a boss for a job and enjoy wages and conditions which are far better than their mem-

bers. Many union officials believe that they should be on managerial wages so that they have the same status as those they negotiate with. The leaders of SIPTU, for example, earn more than £60,000 a year. They have lavish expense accounts and get a union car with the job. To go with this different position in life, union officials develop a hardened set of ideas which no struggle, no matter how powerful will ever wipe out totally. They believe that gradual change, compromise and negotiations are the only way to settle things. This is why many union officials are members of the Labour Party, and despite passing critical resolutions, see it as their natural political home which has to be defended against revolutionary socialists.

Of course, many workers also support the Labour Party and share some of the ideas of the union officials. But strikes and other struggles affect ordinary union members more sharply than they do a union official. The most basic necessities of workers lives are affected by the outcome of these struggles. But the union official's life goes on whether these struggles win or lose. In the Packard factory in Dublin or the United Technology plant in Derry the union officials who urged workers to vote and vote again until they finally agreed to work an extra two hours a week or accept shiftwork, do not work longer themselves. The officials still have their jobs and salary increases even if the members they represent are hammered because they have stuck to 'procedure'.

However, more important than all this is the fact that the union official's whole function in life is one of negotiating with the bosses on behalf of workers. If workers begin to take on the bosses by themselves, if instead of relying on the 'negotiating skills' of their



officials they rely on their own strength as displayed in strike action, then the whole purpose of the union officials' role is called into question. Indeed, the bigger the struggle, the more dramatic the divide between union leaders and the rank and file becomes. For ordinary workers a general strike or a revolution represents the prospect of a better life, for the union officials it represents a threat to their privileged life. For these reasons the key division in the unions is between the rank and file and the full time union officials.

So union leaders are different from the rank and file, but that doesn't mean that they are the same as the bosses. Union leaders do not own factories, sack workers or cut wages. They may be reluctant to call strikes, but sometimes they do. No employer ever called a strike. That the livelihood of the union official ultimately depends on the union, not the employer, is a double edged weapon. It means they are removed from the pressure of the day to day struggle, but also that they need the union to survive.

The union officials are not a class, either of owners like the bosses or of workers like the rank and file. The union officials are an in-between layer. They often sell out as a result of pressure from the bosses. But they can also be pushed into action by the rank and file, provided the pressure is strong enough.

Of course, not all union officials are the same. The national union leader is often further removed from the pressure of the rank and file than the local official. A left wing official is obviously preferable to the dyed-in-the-wool right wing official—if only because the rank and file have more room for action under the left winger. But even the local left wing official will only move if he or she is pushed from below, otherwise pressure from the bosses and the union hierarchy will win out.

What is rank and file organisation?

22 **T**he activities of the union officials can generate considerable frustration among militants. The latter see that struggles have been lost and members victimised

by the foot dragging approach of the union officials. Different strategies have been tried to overcome the problem and some of them are mistaken.

The first is the formation of breakaway union. There is a long history of union militants breaking away and trying to set up their own unions in Ireland. The National Bus and Rail Union, for example, emerged out of the anger and frustration of busworkers with their union officials. But problems quickly develop with breakaways. When the militants split away, the union officials gain even greater control over the remaining members. In a dispute at Irish Rail in 1994 the vast majority of the NBRU members voted for strike while a slim majority of SIPTU voted against. Together in the two unions there was a majority for action—but both sets of officials were able to wheedle out of calling it.

Once established, the new 'militant' union becomes subjected to the same pressures as the old union. It establishes its own bureaucracy; it becomes worried about its funds; to become recognised it agrees to 'abide by procedure'. Quite often the breakaway union is—as a small union—forced to reach settlements worse than the larger, supposedly more right-wing, union. Within a short few years, it is sometimes difficult to tell the difference.

The second mistaken strategy is for militants to think that if only they elected a left wing official or got one appointed they would be much more radical. But this strategy is based on trying to get a voice within the union machine rather than building up the confidence of the rank and file. Even on the rare occasions when genuine left wingers do get a position as a union official they can do very little unless there is a rank and file organisation that is pushing for more militancy among the members. By and large, union officials are far more likely to engage in left wing rhetoric rather than seriously set out to challenge the approach of the ICTU.

A far better way of dealing with the union bureaucracy is to seek to build rank and file organisa-

tions. These are organisations that link together those who want to fight. They are directly elected bodies which are based in the workplaces. The delegates can immediately be re-called and still work the same job as those who elect them, unlike the union officials.

One of the first rank and file organisations was developed in Glasgow during the First World War. Here shop stewards from various engineering factories came together in the Clyde Workers Committee. It grew because the unions were co-operating fully with the government and militants wanted—and had the confidence—to form their own organisations which could call action. The declaration of the Clyde Workers Committee in 1915 sums up the approach of good rank and file organisations.

“We will support the officials so long as they rightly represent the workers, but we will act independently immediately they misrepresent them. Being composed of delegates from every shop and untrammelled by the obsolete rule of law, we claim to represent the true feelings of the workers. We can act immediately according to the merits of the case and the desire of the rank and file.”

These sort of militant rank and file organisations also developed in Ireland at the high point of militancy in the 1960s. Inside, the ESB for example an unofficial Day Workers Association was formed to agitate for better pay. When the government jailed strikers under a special law outlawing strikes in the ESB, the Day Workers Association called more workers out and the government sent the prisoners home in taxis. Later in the early 1970s, a more ambitious Dublin Shop Stewards Committee was formed from a meeting of over 400 shop stewards who were disgusted by the attempts of union leaders to impose pay restraint.

This sort of organisation can only grow when there is a period militancy and a high level of confidence among the rank and file. If it can develop to the extent of cutting across union boundaries and leading mass strikes, it can become a bridge between traditional trade

unionism and workers councils which unite the entire working class and challenge the political and economic power of the ruling class as a whole. A national rank and file movement could advance the struggle in a way that a revolutionary socialist party would not have the forces to do. It becomes a link between workers who are revolutionary and those who have not yet taken that step.

The resistance of workers in Ireland has started to grow again after a long period of defeats in the 1980s. But we are still not at the stage where serious rank and file organisations can be established. In the meantime, however, socialists have to pursue a rank and file strategy: in every struggle this means encouraging the self activity of workers—for active picketing, approaching other workers for solidarity, electing a strike committee to run the strike, and arguing against any reliance on officials, TDs or the media. The backbone of a future rank and file organisation will also come from a network of socialist militants who have won support for their ideas inside their own workplaces. That is why it is important for every socialist to take Socialist Worker and start distributing it around their workmates.

The Labour Party and the state

1992 marked a watershed for the Irish Labour Party. After decades in which it seemed like a small rump party, its fortune suddenly turned and it won its highest vote since the early 1920s.

Many people wanted change in Ireland. They had heard Dick Spring denounce the elite 'Golden Circle' and the corruption of Fianna Fail. And they thought he meant it.

But soon after the election, Spring led the Labour deputies through the Dail lobbies to keep the FF leader Albert Reynolds in power. Two years later he changed his mind, and put the equally right wing John Bruton into office. It seemed like Labour was back to its old tricks—they would sacrifice all their principles for the sight of a Mercedes and a ministerial pension. But why does it happen?

Both the Labour Party and Democratic Left are electoral parties. Their organisations only come alive when they are trying to get a candidate elected a TD. If there is a strike or a struggle in the local community, they are hardly ever involved. They never encourage people to rely on their own strength and activity to win—instead they tell them that their elected representative 'will make representation' on their behalf. For these parties politics is about nothing more than getting a seat in government.

And they will sacrifice almost anything to get there.

Of course, even within this limited view, they have choices. Labour and Democratic Left could argue that the right wing parties of Fianna Fail and Fine Gael should get together. This would help expose the

Tweedledum and Tweedledee nature of these parties, split Irish politics on left-right lines and allow the left to grow in the long term.

But even if Labour got a majority in the Dail, they would not bring fundamental change. This is because Labour and Democratic Left operate on the basis that capitalism is here to stay. If this is the case, then capitalists have to be encouraged and coaxed into giving reform—rather than having their wealth confiscated. But once you leave the wealth in the hands of the few you are beholden to them. When there is a boom in the economy and the system can afford a little more, Labour parties can win a few reforms. But when the system can't afford to give at all, Labour parties act for the system—not the workers. They end up encouraging capitalists to make money—in the hope that they will grant reforms in the future. The first budget by a Labour Party Finance Minister, Ruairi Quinn was rightly described by the Sunday Business Post as a 'bourgeois budget' for the sheer amount of hand outs it gave to the rich.

Labour parties are essentially 'capitalist workers parties'—they are supported and voted for by workers but they have no greater ambition than to run capitalism according to the system's own rules. This means that when they take up office, they invariably come into conflict with their own supporters. The Irish Labour Party attacks semi-state workers as 'uncompetitive'; they urge people to pay their water charges; they make cuts in hospitals; they implement vicious anti-union laws such as the Industrial Relations Act. They will do this whether they are in coalition or in a majority Labour government.

Attempts to change the Labour Party have always proved futile. It usually ends up that socialists do not change the Labour Party but rather the Labour Party changes socialists. In the 1980s, a small but cohesive Labour Left existed inside the Irish Labour Party. By the 1990s, the individuals associated with this group—Michael D Higgins, Emmet Stagg, Joan Burton—had

become leading advocates of coalition.

Many have learnt from bitter experience how Labour and Democratic Left operate and have decided that there is no point voting for a left wing party at all. This is understandable but it offers little strategy for winning the majority of workers to revolutionary socialism.

Left parties like Labour and Democratic Left are different to FF and FG. They are mainly funded by the unions rather than big business. Their base is amongst workers who want change—rather than the hangers-on of the bosses. Every vote for the left indicates a desire for change, for 'doing something' for the poor and the working class. Those who vote for left parties are more likely to listen to the arguments for a socialist alternative—particularly if those making the argument are standing alongside them in a battle against the right. Revolutionary socialists should vote left, while simultaneously pointing out the need for a fighting alternative.

There is an additional reason for doing this. Many people do not break away from the idea of trying to reform the system by argument alone. Direct experience of what actually happens when Labour is in office is more powerful than the most eloquently presented case. The more workers vote Labour or DL, the more they are breaking from the pro-capitalist propaganda of FF or FG and the more they will see in practice whether revolutionaries or Labour leaders were telling the truth about the nature of these parties in office.

It is through a combination of argument and experience that most people can move from looking to Labour or DL to backing a socialist alternative. When that alternative is large enough it will be able to challenge these parties in a direct struggle for power. This challenge may involve standing candidates who see parliament only as a platform for their views. But the main arena where a revolutionary alternative will defeat Labour will be in the workplaces and in the struggles of local communities.

The state

Since our days at school we are constantly told that we live in a democracy and that the best way to bring change is to get people elected to parliament. Revolutions, we are told, are unnecessary in modern society. Yet the remarkable thing about the parliamentary system is how resistant it is to real change, let alone socialism.

General elections do not provide an even playing field between the left and the right. Right wing governments can promise the world at elections times—knowing that they can break their promises afterwards. They can choose the timing of elections and with the help of their friends in big business postpone cutbacks until after the election is won. Even the way constituencies are divided up is biased against the left. Rural areas tend to be slightly over-represented. The constituencies are divided along geographical boundaries which mix together conflicting classes. To win a seat, candidates often have to avoid 'extreme' policies which put the interests of the working class to the fore.

More importantly, voting is a very individualised and passive act. You only get to vote a few times in a lifetime. Large groups of people do not get together on the basis of their experience of struggle to decide what they need. Instead people choose politicians when they are at their weakest—as isolated voters who read the bosses press or listen to the TV. O'Reilly's papers attempt to set the agenda of the electoral campaign by defining certain types of policies as 'impractical'. They narrow down the political options to who best can run capitalism.

But these are not the main reasons why the machinery of the state is useless for bringing socialism.

The vast bulk of the machinery of the state is unelected and outside the control of the majority of the population. No one elects the people who run the army, the police, the top of the civil service, the judges, or the heads of big state companies. Yet these people have more power over our lives than the politicians. The heads of the British Army or the RUC can cover up for murders committed by their forces. Today there are hardly any of the security forces in prison for the killings they committed during the North's troubles. Most of Ireland's top judges have gone to a private school and come from an upper class background. They have a wide scope to interpret the law and have used that power to ban strikes, to force local authorities to pay millions to private builders and to cover for injustices meted out by the Gardai and the RUC.

The heads of the civil service are also a tiny elite that is beyond the control of even the elected TDs. JJ McElligot was the key civil servant at the Department of Finance from 1927 to 1953 where he managed to successfully oppose almost every extension of the welfare system because it constituted a "state interference in the domestic spirit of the families". The mandarins at the top of the Irish civil service have tremendous power today. In 1994, a top civil servant stopped the priest Fr Brendan Smyth from being extradited for child abuse. But even the Dail Committee that was set up to examine the affair was not allowed to examine the civil service files in order to find out who gave the orders.

The truth is that it is not parliament, not even the cabinet, which runs the state but the state that runs parliament. The unelected civil servants or police chiefs cajole, bamboozle the individual Ministers into operating in grooves that have long been established.

Even when this fails, the ruling class have another card to play—their economic power. There is supposed to be political equality in capitalism but this equality is a sham. Capitalists have a vast arsenal of power because they control the wealth of society. If a govern-

ment takes any measure that they are displeased with, they can move their money out of the country. In 1983, for example, Alan Dukes, the FG Minister for Finance introduced a minor change in law to close a loop hole in the taxation of government bonds. Within hours of Dukes announcement, the Irish Times could report that a champagne breakfast was held in Jury's Hotel to listen to the advice of a prominent 'investment analyst'. When the stock exchange re-opened, £800 million was removed from government bonds and Dukes was forced to retreat.

Remember that Dukes is a conservative. When a left government tries to implement some of the policies they get elected on, they run into even greater storms. In 1981, the French Socialist Party led by Mitterrand won the election with a promise of major reforms. But there was soon a major run on the currency and a withdrawal of investment from France. Mitterrand did a U-turn on his programme and introduced a series of cuts in order to 'win back business confidence'.

But what would happen if a Labour Party was to push the process one step further? What if they asked workers to respond to the blackmail of big business and start occupying their workplaces?

This is a step that the elected Chilean government of Allende came near to taking in the early 1970s. Chile has a long history of parliamentary democracy. Everyone, including the most radical parties, accepted that the state institutions were subject to parliamentary control. They were proved wrong. Allende found that the heads of the army and police sided with the ruling class rather than the elected leaders of parliament. Although Allende appealed to his supporters to trust the army, they staged a bloody coup in which 30,000 trade unionists and socialist lost their lives. When it came to a decisive battle, the fig leaf of neutrality that covered the armed forces was taken off and they moved to protect the wealthy.

In all large scale battles such as general strikes or

revolutions, the state stands before the working class movement reduced to its bare essentials: the rule of force wielded on behalf of a tiny minority, the rich. The veil of parliament is brushed aside and the rule of the baton wielding policeman, the army strike breaker, the judge who wrongfully imprisons have their day. The Russian revolutionary Lenin was right to say that at the heart of the state lies 'bodies of armed men, prisons, etc'.

Unlike a left government, workers do have the power to confront and overcome the power of the state. Strikes can paralyse the civil service and mass demonstrations can be too powerful for even the most determined police. If workers are organised and determined, they can win over large sections of an army that is recruited from working class backgrounds. The rest can be too demoralised and too small, compared to the mass movement, to offer resistance. If it seems that the old order is really about to crumble, then the authority of the officers and the hierarchy on which the police and army depend will crumble with it.

But for the workers movement to be sufficiently determined it needs to be clear that the state cannot be reformed, clear that the state must be smashed.

Only when workers own organisations—strike committees, workers councils, trade unions—are willing and able to take over the running of society will the power of the existing capitalist state be broken. For that, a revolution is necessary.

Fighting fascism and racism

Racism

If you are born black in Western Europe today the facts of life are brutally simple. On average you will be poorer, receive a worse education, live in worse accommodation, be paid less if you do find a job and be more likely to be insulted or assaulted on the street than if you were born white.

Racism came into the world with the capitalist system. It grew up alongside the slave trade between Africa, Europe and America between the 1600s and the 1800s. The excuse for the enslavement and inhuman treatment of six million slaves transported from Africa was that they did not deserve rights, they were inferior to white people. Racist ideas evolved among the slave-owners of the plantations of the West Indies and America and were taken up by a European capitalist class anxious to defend a trade without which they would have never created their fortunes.

Later these ideas were used to justify colonisation, so Kipling the British poet could write about "the white man's burden" to civilise a people who were "half devil and half child". Racism directed against the Irish is another example. The British rulers were looking to excuse their ruthless plunder of the country. They created an image of the Irish as stupid and lazy to support their 'civilizing' mission. These ideas also helped British employers get away with low wages and terrible conditions for the Irish workers they employed.

There have been other forms of discrimination in history. Pre-capitalist societies have discriminated

against certain groups on religious or social grounds. The ruling class in ancient Rome thought that all non-Romans were barbarians—but this wasn't a racial characteristic. A Gaul could become a Roman by pledging loyalty to the Empire. Equally, ancient Rome was a slave society, but slavery wasn't decided on racial grounds. Slaves, like Roman emperors, were both black and white. In medieval Europe religious persecution was common but one could convert to the faith of the rulers and become accepted.

The racism developed by capitalism is more barbaric because as nationalism and empire grew up discrimination became an indelible mark associated with race. A black person cannot 'convert' into a white person and no Jewish person could imagine that claiming allegiance to the Nazis would stop them from being sent to the concentration camp.

Even after the formal empires which gave rise to racism were destroyed—by the two world wars this century, revolutions in Europe and national liberation struggles in the Third World—racism remained. It still is the crutch supporting every intervention, economic and military, by major powers against the poorer countries. The language has changed, but not much. Instead of "fuzzy-wuzzy", we now have "Arab terrorists". Instead of "savages and cannibals" we have "Somali warlords" or "Islamic fundamentalists". The message is the same: the uncivilised "them" must accept domination by civilised "us". If they don't there is always the threat of IMF austerity programmes, UN blockades or US firepower to teach them a lesson.

There is another reason why racism is still important to capitalism. As capitalism grew it drew the population of other countries into their home economies. Racism was used to pay immigrants lower wages and to keep workers divided. When the post war boom began to fade it provided right-wing politicians with scapegoats for poverty and unemployment. Failings due to capitalism: lack of housing; jobs; social services—these are said to be the result of there being too many

immigrants. By attacking immigrants, governments everywhere are setting worker against worker, as well as portraying the nation as being united against outsiders.

The Irish government is no better in this respect than any other European government, even though the immigrant population is tiny. The rights of asylum seekers here are the worst in Europe. There are in fact no statutory rights at all and illegal immigrants are entirely at the mercy of the authorities, with no rights of appeal. This is why Ji Yao Lu, having fled the repression against demonstrators in Tiananmen Square, found himself in Mountjoy for six months. The way citizenship is granted is also clearly racist. The 1991 figures show that while 1800 Europeans of non-EU origin and 7600 Americans have been granted Irish citizenship, not one person from Africa or Asia has received citizenship.

No working class person has any interest in going along with racist ideas. If employers can get low wages because of the colour of someone's skin, they will use the threat of cheap labour to force all workers to accept less. We should never let employers get away with the idea that workers in the Third World are our "competitors" and therefore our "enemies". Instead we should point to the magnificent efforts of workers in Africa and elsewhere to build unions despite the vicious repression of governments who get the backing to the Western powers. Instead of supporting calls to ban products or restrict trade we should give backing and support to every effort to build militant unions throughout the world.

We should also oppose Ireland's immigration controls as completely racist and hypocritical. Millionaires have little difficulty obtaining Irish passports. But if you are poor and black you are kept out. According to Des O'Malley a trade has grown up among the rich for Irish citizenship, with fees of £60,000 being charged for the deals. He should know. As a former Justice Minister he would have been responsible for dealing

with citizenship applications.

Socialists are against all immigration controls. Irish people have always travelled freely back and forth to Britain. Sometimes these Irish immigrants were blamed by fascist groups like the National Front for causing unemployment in Britain. But every person coming to the country is someone with the potential to create wealth. They bring a cultural diversity that makes life exiting and interesting. If there's poverty in Ireland, it is the fault of Irish exploiters and not immigrants.

Fascism

Few people born after the Second World War could have thought that they would ever see the rise of mass fascist parties again. They saw what the Nazis had done in the Holocaust when they murdered six million Jews as well as gypsies, gays and socialists. They hoped that the world would never see a nightmare like that again. Yet at the end of the twentieth century fascism has once again become a threat.

In Russia, fascists have become a major force in the new parliament. In Italy, the fascists have put on pin stripe suits and have taken part in Berlusconi's recent coalition government. In half a dozen European countries Nazi parties are stronger than at any time since the Second World War.

Why are the Nazis growing? How big a threat do they pose? Is Ireland immune to this threat? What is the best way of stopping them?

The Nazis feed on despair. Where people are worn down by mass unemployment, low wages, homelessness and poor housing, hope is driven out and despair can creep in. For 20 or 30 years after the Second World War there was a long boom in the world economy (countries like Ireland, which suffered recession in the 1950s were the exception). Many people came to believe that their children's lives would be better than the lives they had. These hopes have been disappointed in the last 20 years.

Economic disappointment has gone hand in hand

with political disillusionment. All the old certainties—about the incorruptibility of the police, the fairness of courts, the trustworthiness of politicians—are vanishing. Where such traditional ways of life and old values collapse, new ideas inevitably grow. They can easily be the ideas of the left—as happen in France in 1934 when a strike wave and mass radicalisation defeated the fascists. But the fascists could grow, defeating the left and the workers movement—as the Nazis did in Germany.

In fact we stand a much better chance of defeating the Nazis today than did the German left of the 1930s. Serious though today's economic crisis is, it is not as deep as the German crisis in the 1930s. In 1932 in Germany there were 8 million unemployed and no unemployment benefit. Today the despair created by unemployment is great. But their numbers are not yet so high and they get a level of support which is enough to keep at bay the desperation felt by German workers in the 1930s.

Neither is the crisis sufficiently deep to drive the middle class into the arms of the fascists as happened in Germany. Hyper inflation is not wiping out family savings and small business are not being driven to the wall in such massive numbers. Middle class despair has not turned into a political frenzy.

The Nazis themselves are much weaker than in the 1930s Germany. By 1930, Hitler could rely on 100,000 storm troopers, by 1932 the figure had risen to 400,000. Today even the biggest Nazi organisations in Europe have nothing like these forces. They have a degree of electoral support but not yet a comparable fighting force. Meanwhile, on our side, the level of struggle is much higher than in the 1930s—as strikes and anti-fascist mobilisations across Europe show.

So the Nazis are not yet as big a threat as they were in the 1930s. But they can easily continue to grow. The left must take action to ensure that when workers break from old values, they are won to a socialist alternative, not to Nazi reaction.

Ireland has no serious fascist organisation at the moment. But it would be wrong to believe that this country is more tolerant and therefore immune from fascism. In the 1930s, the Blueshirts became a major force and were even a component in the eventual formation of Fine Gael. Certain individuals have tried to propagate fascist ideas but have not been able to organise—mainly because of the activities of Ireland's Anti-Nazi League. When the Nazi Professor in Coleraine, Richard Lynn, began attacking black people for being "less intelligent" the ANL mobilised to such an extent

RIGHTS FOR WHITES!



that he had to take early retirement. None of this, however, is any reason to be complacent and socialists in Ireland need to know the best way of fighting the fascist threat.

To beat the Nazis you have to understand its power base.

The core of a Nazi organisation comes from the middle class, be it the traditional middle class of shop keepers and professionals or the new middle class of under managers, supervisors and foremen. These layers are particularly vulnerable in a social crisis. They have neither the economic power of big business nor the collective power of trade unions. They hate the working class which demands more wages, yet at the

same time they are angry at big business which squeezes their living standards.

By themselves, these layers can do very little. They need to draw in wider forces often from amongst the most dispossessed and despairing section of the work-

ing class—the permanently unemployed or those who have been pulled into a life of petty crime as a way of surviving. This motley collection cannot hope to make changes in capitalist society unless it can gain support from one of the major classes. Mass support from the working class is ruled out by the very nature of Nazism—the deadly threat it poses to organised labour. Even at their height the Nazis in Germany could never poll more than 10% in shop steward elections. But support from the ruling class is possible—provided the Nazis can offer something that a traditional right wing party cannot. Therefore the distinctive feature of the Nazis' programme is the physical destruction of the workers' movement. If successful they offer a street fighting force which can cow trade unionists and socialists.

If society is facing a crisis and big business is frightened of the workers movement it can turn to the fascists. Neither Hitler nor Mussolini took power until they had won the backing of key sections of the ruling class. Mussolini's March on Rome did not start until he won the backing of the Confederation of Italian Industrialists and the representatives of the larger farmers.

Once we understand the nature of fascism it is possible to build an effective strategy to oppose it. The first step is to deny the Nazis the ability to build a street fighting organisation that can appeal to ruling class backers. This means preventing them marching and organising on the streets. The Blueshirts in Ireland in the 1930s were always met by huge mobilisations which prevented them winning control of the streets. In Britain the Anti-Nazi League has successfully stopped fascist marches in London and elsewhere. But even before they get to this stage in Ireland, we need to stop every attempt the fascists make at organising. When the fascist organiser David Irving tried to speak at Trinity College in 1990, the Anti-Nazi League mobilised 800 students to prevent the meeting going ahead. If a fascist cell had been established, black students and gay students would have been subjected to attacks.

* EXCEPT FOR SOCIALISTS, TRADE UNIONISTS, WORKERS, WOMEN, GAYS, LESBIANS, TRAVELLERS, GYPSIES, SINGLE MOTHERS, DISCENTERS, DISABLED, YOUTH, CHILDREN,

We need to act on the advice that Hitler once gave his opponents:

“Only one thing could have stopped our movement—if our adversaries had understood its principle and, from the first day, had smashed with the utmost brutality the nucleus of our movement.”

To do this effectively means mobilising everyone who is against the Nazis—black and white, trade union members, Labour Party supporters and people who are in no political party at all, as well as revolutionaries. This type of united front—such as the Anti-Nazi League—has to be geared to activity and not be a talking shop or a debating society. And it must restrict itself to mobilising the maximum numbers on the single issue of defeating the Nazis.

This united anti-fascist activity is of course limited in how successful it can be. It is treating the symptom not the cause. Beating back the fascists is extremely important, but there will always be the threat of fascism growing again so long as we live in a capitalist system—with its consequent economic poverty and racism, from which fascism can appear. So within and alongside the united front against fascism we need to raise two issues.

Firstly, we need to insist that a militant workers movement is not just the best way to fight for decent conditions, it also strikes a blow against the roots of fascism. It replaces despair with faith in collective working class action in a crisis. It helps to unite black and white workers and provides an opportunity to undermine racism.

Secondly, we should argue that the threat of fascism will be only finally removed when the insane system that produces economic crises and social despair is replaced with a socialist society.

Agreement with these two arguments are not pre-conditions for joining the fight against fascism. People who disagree with socialists on these and a variety of other issues are more than welcome in the common fight against fascism. But the more people that can be

convinced of these arguments, the stronger the anti-fascist movement will be and the closer we will be to striking at the roots of fascism.

Fighting for sexual liberation

Irish society has a terrible record when it comes to women's rights. In the past women used to be driven out of civil service jobs when they got married. If a married woman had an affair with another man, her husband could sue her lover for "loss of services". Women were not called for jury service and could not even apply for a passport without their husband's permission. Women who deviated from the norm and had children outside wedlock were sent to Magdalen laundries—called after Mary Magdalen in the Bible—where they became char ladies for the nuns. These type of brutal and horrible conditions survived up to twenty years ago.

Conditions began to change as women refused to put up with these insults. The growth of the Irish economy meant that more and more women were drawn into the workforce and started to demand their independence. A small but vociferous women's liberation movement grew. Irish society became more and more affected by European Union legislation which traditionally encouraged women to join the workforce. But the changes did not come evenly and gradually. Quite the contrary, the Bishops and a set of small right wing fringe groups have sought to challenge every advance for women in Irish society.

SEXUAL
STEREO
TYPING
POOL



Today discrimination against women is still not hard to see. Women in manufacturing industry are paid only two thirds of average male earnings. There are few creches for working mothers. Women still do far more housework and child care than men and divorce is still banned. Irish society still tries to play down the level of sexual harassment and violence that occurs inside and outside the family. Like in all other capitalist societies, women are portrayed in everything from pornography to advertising as if their sexuality was the only important thing about them. All women suffer this kind of oppression. Whether you are a princess or pauper oppression will touch your life—but not to the same degree.

There may still be fewer women bank managers and TDs than there are male bank managers and TDs, but rich women can find ways of relieving the burden of oppression, ways that are not available to working class women.

Rich women can employ nannies or maids to look after their children while working class women have to pay up to half their wages for poor child-minding arrangements. Irish women who want abortion have to travel to Britain but this obstacle affects rich and poor women differently. Wealthy Irish women have always been able to book into the top class clinics in the exclusive Harley Street while thousands of poorer women have difficulty in scraping together the money for the operation. According to the Irish Family Planning Services, 67% of those they helped had financial problems because abortion is not freely available in Ireland. A loveless or violent relationship is easier to escape if you have money. Rape and sexual harassment are easier to avoid if you can take a taxi everywhere rather than walk or use the buses.

Indeed rich women benefit from the oppression of poor women. Businesswomen like Gillian Bowler or Norma Smurfit benefit from the fact that the companies they are associated with pay lower wages to women or do not provide a creche for their staff. So

women's oppression looks very different depending on whether you are in the castle or the cottage.

The existence of class divisions has bedevilled the women's movement since its foundation. In the early 1970s, upper class women in the AIM group broke away from the Irish Women's Liberation movement because they thought it was too radical. They wanted to gather together a group of 'experts' who could influence the right wing politicians. One of its leaders, Nuala Fennell later joined Fine Gael. Later, Frances Fitzgerald from the Council for the Status of Women—or the Council of Women with Status, as some have called it—also joined Fine Gael. Many who came out of the early women's movement have found cosy niches for themselves in the professions while little has changed in the lives of the majority of working class women.

To see why this happened we need to understand why women are oppressed. The answer lies in the way capitalism works. Capitalists need two things in order to make a profit. They need factories and machines, offices and banks. They also need a healthy and educated workforce—and that costs money. The state provides some of what is needed for such a workforce through the education and health system, although the money for these come predominantly from the PAYE sector. But a great deal of the time, effort and money that is needed to reproduce a new workforce each generation comes from the private family.

This is the key to women's oppression: the system largely depends on women's unpaid labour in the home for the creation of a fit and educated workforce. Everything else about women's oppression—the lower paid jobs, the sexual stereotyping and the physical attacks—bolsters women's role in housework and child care.

Two conclusions follow. Firstly, it is the way in which capitalism works that creates the institutions and values which lead to the oppression of women, not the interests of men, either individually or as a group.

Some ruling class men have a vested interest in the maintenance of the oppression of women—but the same cannot be said for the working class.

Working class men gain nothing if women are paid low wages or are excluded from the workforce. The bosses use low paid workers as a lever to lower the wages of all workers. The more equal and the higher women's wages and the more women have access to full employment, the better the chances of all workers wages and job prospects rising. Equally, working class men do not benefit from their partners being driven to exhaustion by the double burden of child care and a job. Male and female workers have an interest in seeing that good quality free creches are available. Their lives would be enhanced if there were more cheap restaurant facilities to take the pressure off cooking day in and day out in their home.

It is a different story for the tiny elite of ruling class men. They have every interest in keeping women in the home as a source of cheap domestic labour. They want to perpetuate divisions in the working class in order to drag down the pay and conditions of all workers. Many ruling class women, whose wealth depends on the exploitation of workers will also support the continued oppression of women, even if they might campaign for their own equality within the establishment.

It follows that the feminist strategy of uniting all women against all men is fatally flawed. Many working class men can be won to supporting the demands for women's liberation, while many ruling class men and women cannot.

Socialists are for women's liberation, and even for reforms that benefit mainly middle class women. But for liberation to mean anything to the vast majority of working class women, and for it to be successful it has to come from a wider struggle against capitalism itself. Some, because of their experience of oppression may choose to organise separately and socialists will but defend their right to do so. But we do not consider this

to be an effective strategy. To overthrow the system which creates the roots of women's oppression the maximum unity is required. In the day to day battles against women's oppression, the key to winning is to raise issues inside the unions and the wider working class. During the X case—when judges tried to stop a 14 year old rape victim from going to Britain for an abortion—it was crucial that thousands of women and men took to the streets to force through some changes. By contrast those who want simply to advance the interest of middle class women inside the system will seek to establish separate organisations that attempt to influence those inside the corridors of power.

Socialists therefore seek to unite our class by fighting every manifestation of oppression and sexism. While middle class women who have already made some gains may seek to turn their back on struggle, we stand for the full liberation of all working class women.

Why we are for gay and lesbian liberation

Homosexuality was only legalised in the Republic of Ireland in 1993. The sexuality of many famous Irish men and women—such as Oscar Wilde, Roger Casement, Kate O'Brien—was denied to enforce the idea that homosexuality was something foreign and unnatural.

But even though the law has changed gay men and lesbians are still subject to right wing hysterical campaigns that blame them for undermining 'family values'. Typical in this regard are groups like Family Solidarity that once charged gay men with 'engendering a pool of infection and disease'. This same grouping also campaigns against divorce, contraception and even the Stay Safe programme in schools which is designed to warn children against the dangers of sex abuse. These type of groups hate any talk of sexual openness. They want to drive Ireland back to the myths of the 1950s. Their ideas are sometimes picked up in the tabloid press which is always trying to find scape-

goats for the failings of capitalism. Gays in Northern Ireland also suffer regular harassment from the RUC. Socialists have to stand up against these attacks and oppose the oppression of gays and lesbians in this society.

The oppression of gays and lesbians is closely linked to capitalism's need to reproduce new generations of workers at a minimum cost. The best way for the system to do this is to push as much as possible of the cost of child care onto working class individuals themselves. This is why the establishment promotes the idea that the only 'normal' way to live is in a 'married with two kids' family set up. Yet households increasingly diverge from this norm. One in eight Irish births are now to single women. Many couples live in rented accommodation with no children. With more people living longer, there are now more single pensioners.

But it doesn't matter how much reality diverges from the traditional, we are still told to stick with 'family values'. The Bishops denounce every move that 'opens the floodgates' as if civilisation is about to collapse. Politicians indulge in great bouts of hypocrisy about the 'threat to the family' as if only married people love their children or care for their parents. They are all the time trying to force ordinary people to live in patterns that are much more rigid than they want their lives to be.

Of course, the people who do this preaching often turn out to lead double lives. Bishop Eamonn Casey spent much time opposing abortion and promoting 'family values'—but he avoided even speaking to his own son, Peter, until the boy was 18. Other Bishops



who talk about the need children have for stable family relationships do absolutely nothing when they are informed that some of their own priests, such as Fr Brendan Smyth, were abusing these very children.

The 'order' they want to impose on our personal, emotional and sexual lives suits the need of the system, not our needs. To live outside this order is to suffer sexual discrimination because your sexual preference doesn't fit the imposed pattern. Lesbians and gay appear as a standing affront to the moralists and bigots who deny that sex can purely be for enjoyment. They demand that all sex be 'open to procreation' within a nuclear family. These attacks mean that gays can often find themselves sacked or refused a job or subjected to verbal and physical assault.

It should be a matter of principle for socialists to oppose such oppression.

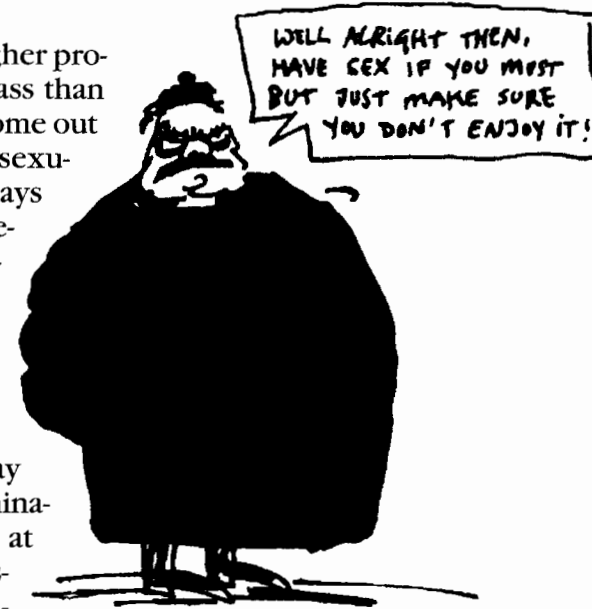
Such oppression found little organised resistance from gays and lesbians until the late 1960s. Then the great civil rights struggles by American blacks, the resistance to the Vietnam war, the general strike in France, the international student struggles and the birth of the modern women's movement all had their effects on gays and lesbians. This was the era when the Gay Liberation Front was born in America and elsewhere, taking its name from the Vietnamese National Liberation Front. It was the birth of organised, political resistance by gays. The resistance looked to other oppressed groups and sought radical change. The Irish gay movement developed in the 1980s and was much smaller. But in all countries there was soon a division at the heart of the gay movement because the oppression of gays and lesbians, like that of women, touches people from every class but does not touch them equally.

Those who can afford to avoid poor housing and be part of the growing pink economy of clubs and pubs, can often shield themselves from the worst oppression. A worker, perhaps living at home or with little contact with other gays or lesbians does not have the same opportunities.

This is why a higher proportion of middle class than working class gays come out openly about their sexuality. It is also why gays and lesbians often believe that their oppression can be beaten by changing their lifestyle—lifestyle politics. It can seem as if establishing a comfortable way of life where discrimination is partially held at bay and gay and lesbian identity celebrated is all that can be achieved. However understandable, this is ultimately a self defeating strategy. It tends to stress what separates gay and lesbians from others not what all the oppressed and exploited have in common.

Socialists argue the best way to fight for gay and lesbian liberation lies in fighting for unity in the working class movement. It isn't always easy to convince people to support gays and lesbians, though it is a lot easier today because of such efforts in the past. But such unity is possible because all workers, gay and straight, face the same enemy. The Bishops who denounce homosexuality also attack women's rights and denounced the TEAM workers when they were locked out. The Gardai victimise gays and pickets. Capitalists refuse to allocate resources in order to find a cure for AIDS—but they also try to turn health care generally into a business for profit.

Here, in the common class interest that most gays and lesbians share with all workers, is the key to liberation. Instead of praising right wingers like Maire Geoghan Quinn for lifting the ban on homosexuality, the gay movement should be fighting alongside others



who oppose the right wing policies of Fianna Fail and Fine Gael.

Capitalism distorts every aspect of our lives—including our sexuality. It deprives us of any satisfaction in our work and claims that fulfilment comes only from the private and personal side of our lives. People are encouraged to expect the absolute most from personal relationships but are never really given the freedom to enjoy them. The result can be frustration, unhappiness and even sometimes, violence.

Socialists are for a society where sex is to be enjoyed without being subject to a hypocritical morality which is really about seeking to control individuals. The condition for this form of sexual liberation is that we live in a free society where we are treated as human beings.

Fighting sectarianism in Northern Ireland

In almost every other country in the world, Catholics and Protestants live beside each other with no conflict. Yet in Northern Ireland, people go to different schools; they play different games; they use different flags and emblems. Today 90% of Catholics and Protestants live in areas that are predominantly of one religion.

Some believe that this situation is the result of a passion for tribal identities. They claim that Catholics and Protestants are determined to promote their distinctive culture and that this cultural difference lies at the heart of the conflict.

The reality is quite different. Sectarianism in Northern Ireland, is based on the fact that the state people live under was formed with the express purpose of excluding the disloyal Catholics. It was built around bigotry and discrimination.

Since its formation, every Prime Minister in the North was drawn from the Orange Order—an organisation which excludes Catholics. Only one opposition Bill was ever passed in the old Stormont parliament and that was the Wild Bird Conservation Act!

Unionist dominated local authorities discriminated against Catholics in jobs and housing. Catholics were not even allowed to march in the city centres of Derry and Belfast although they had to watch Orange parades go through their areas.

Throughout 'the troubles', this reality has been hidden by the British press in particular. They have pre-

sented Britain's role in the North as a sort of 'piggy in the middle' trying to mediate in a conflict which grew out of an Irish tribal causes.

But the reality is quite different. Ireland was partitioned because it served British imperial interests at the time. British capital was heavily invested in the North's ship building and engineering industries. Britain's rulers believed that the Irish national movement might offer an example to other oppressed peoples in its empire. The partition of Ireland helped to establish a "carnival of reaction" as James Connolly predicted. The most conservative politicians dominated both states that were mirror images of each other.

Even after the direct economic interests of the British establishment changed, it continued to prop up a violent sectarian state in Northern Ireland. Far from acting as a peace-keeping force, the British Army was concentrated in Catholic areas. Its intelligence service were deeply implicated in co-operating with Loyalist killer gangs. Throughout its 25 year stay in Northern Ireland, it has murdered 350 people.

Socialists are for workers unity. We want working class people from both sides of the religious divide to come together and fight back against their employers who have used sectarianism to divide them. This unity is forged on an economic level almost every day. Catholic and Protestant workers belong to the same unions; they share a common hatred of the Tories; they both want to defend the NHS.

But to become a lasting unity, this has to be deepened and made more political. Precisely because the Northern state has played such an active role in dividing workers, unity needs to be forged in opposition to that state. No workers should believe that the RUC is 'their' police force or that the Queen is the symbol of their culture.

For this reason there is absolutely no contradiction between advocating workers unity and opposing the Northern state. Indeed it is essential to do both.

Republicanism

Modern day Irish republicanism grew out of the struggle against the Northern state. In 1969, thousands took to the streets to demand an end to discrimination and repression. They were inspired by the radical upheavals of the 1960s and, in particular, by the black civil rights movement in America. When they were met with baton charges, internment and eventually murder on Bloody Sunday 1972, many drew the conclusion that the only way to fight back was by means of the armed struggle which republicanism offered.

Republicanism became the vehicle by which they expressed their revolt against oppression. Its violence was a response to the institutionalised violence of the state.

Whenever oppressed people fight back, socialists cannot be neutral. Even if these struggles are led by non-socialists and adopt methods which no socialist advocates, the struggle should be supported. Thousands become political through their experience of oppression—but this direct experience does not necessarily lead them in a socialist direction. Blacks can see all whites as the enemy; Catholics can regard Protestant workers as nothing more than a 'labour aristocracy'. If socialists only support those struggles which directly and explicitly challenge capitalism, they will end up turning a blind eye to the oppressed.

Socialists have, in fact, found themselves on the same side as republicans over the past few decades. Socialists and republicans both opposed the presence of the British army; they both favoured granting political prisoners political status; they both advocated the disbandment of the RUC as a sectarian force. But being on the same side, did not mean that there was agreement on the goals or the methods by which the struggle was conducted.

In the recent past, republicans believed that the armed struggle was the key to victory. The arguments for this tactic varied: sometimes it was claimed that economic damage would bring results; at other times

it was believed that the armed struggle was a form of propaganda that kept the issue of oppression on the front pages. Neither view was sustainable. More economic damage is inflicted on British capitalism by a powerful strike or even by great movements of currency speculation than by any bomb. Publicity can inform, sometimes stimulate and sometimes dull awareness—but it never wins struggles.

Despite their aura of militancy, guerrilla fighters operate as 'reformists with guns'. They stress the passivity of the mass of workers and claim that small numbers of heroic individuals bring liberation for the masses. In the words of the Russian Revolutionary, Trotsky, this tactic:

"Belittles the role of the masses in their own consciousness, reconciles them to their powerlessness and turns eyes and hopes towards a great avenger and liberator who some day will come and accomplish his mission."

In a situation where Northern workers were already divided, the tactic of armed struggle was singularly counter-productive. It helped drive hundreds of Protestant workers into new a sympathy with the loyalist paramilitaries. It alienated vast number of workers in the South who never trusted the British army or the RUC but who, because they did not directly experience its harassment, regarded the IRA simply as terrorists.

The ending of the armed conflict has created many new openings in the North and is welcomed by socialists. But the shift in republican strategy is no improvement in terms of making advances. They have moved from the role of guerrilla fighters to seeking allies in the establishment in Ireland and America. Once again they hope that there is some force on high which will deliver liberation from oppression. This time they hope that the Southern state, the Irish American rich and the SDLP can combine to pressurise Britain's rulers to withdraw.

It is both a futile and disastrous strategy. Futile,

because none of these forces favour the fundamental dismantling of the Northern state. Disastrous, because this strategy aligns Catholics workers with the most right wing elements in society. The price of this new alliance is that Gerry Adams, for example, pays homage to Bill Clinton who presides over racist discrimination against US blacks. Adams also ended up calling for the former Fianna Fail leader, Albert Reynolds, to be kept in office to aid the peace process. The new language of courting the establishment allows for no talk of seeking to dismantle the Southern state as well as the Northern state.

Irish republicanism has historically vacillated between a veneration of the gun and a cringing attitude to seeking an entry into the establishment. The path modern republicans are following is on that has already been marked out by De Valera and Micheal Collins. The reason for this vacillation is that republicans rule out the only alternative to either armed struggle or constitutional politics—mass working class mobilisation. In particular, they claim that Protestant workers are privileged and are irredeemably drawn to loyalism. Therefore they argue that a united Ireland must be achieved before Protestant workers can play a progressive role in Irish politics. In this they are fundamentally wrong.

Protestant workers and Loyalism

Few can deny that the traditional political allegiance of many Protestant workers has been to Unionism. Pro-Tory bigots have been returned in Protestant working class constituencies for decades because they were seen to be strong on the 'constitutional question'.

But there is a difference between people's traditional allegiances and their real interests. Unionism tries to convince Protestant workers that they are superior to Catholics. But this does not change the reality that Protestant workers are still workers. They have to sell their labour; they can be sacked by their employers; their conditions of work are under continual attack.

This puts them fundamentally at odds with a party that was once directly tied to the British Conservatives.

That is why the history of Protestant workers is riddled with contradictions. Despite voting for Unionist politicians, they have united with Catholic workers in the most militant of struggles. In 1907, 1919, 1932 the militancy of Protestant and Catholic workers rocked the establishment throughout Ireland and Britain.

It is sometimes assumed that if one set of workers are discriminated against, the other section must be benefiting. In fact the opposite is true in Northern Ireland. Precisely because sectarianism divides workers, the confidence and militancy of all workers is weakened. A worker who holds racist, sexist or sectarian ideas is often the very worker who loses out because of those ideas. In America, many white Southern workers have the most appalling racist ideas. But precisely because these ideas are the source of division, they end up, earning less than Northern black workers.

The same dynamic operates in Northern Ireland. Far from the Orange Order being able to grant extra privileges to Protestant workers, its poisonous ideology has led to a situation where all workers, including Protestant workers, have lost out. Wage rates in the North are 15% below British rates. Despite high rates of trade unionism, the conditions of work of many Northern workers are appalling. Working class children do worse under the North's education system because it is the only place in the UK to have retained the vicious 11+ exam where children are graded at this young age.

For decades this divergence between the political allegiance and the real interests of Protestant workers was almost only an abstract proposition. But today this is changing. Many of the mechanisms that have tied Protestant workers to their Unionist bosses are far weaker than ever before.

In the past, Protestant workers were more likely to be male, skilled and employed by a boss who was also a member of the Orange Order. The security of

this position was underpinned by a notion of Britain as a more advanced and progressive country than the backward priest ridden South.

Recent changes in British and Irish capitalism has undermined this base for Unionist ideas. Today Protestant workers are on lower wages, in more mixed skill jobs, often working alongside Catholics in either multi-national firms or the public sector. Being British today means being part of a low wage economy, where for example, workers in the Daewoo plant in Northern Ireland earn less than the parent company in South Korea. On top of all that, Britain's shifting interest in pulling away from a clear identification with Unionism, leaves a sense of betrayal.

The result is a growing splintering of the Unionist monolith. When old certainties start to crumble, people look in one of two ways. They can try desperately to restore the old order in more desperate and vicious fashions. Or they could start to move very rapidly from an identification with Orangeism to seeing themselves as part of a wider working class. In other words they can move sharply to the left or the right. Which direction they take depends on their experience of struggle—and the political alternatives that are on offer to them.

Class not creed

Over the next few years the rulers of Britain and Ireland will work on a new solution to the North. They will discuss constitutional issues at length and develop a new jargon such as talk about "parity of esteem". But whatever details they arrive at, there will be little fundamental change in the lives of working people.

Most probably there will be a stronger all-Ireland framework where Dublin has a greater say in the running of Northern Ireland. The rulers of Britain wish to come to a greater accommodation with the Southern government and the Catholic middle class. But none of this will come anywhere near realising the ambition

of Wolfe Tone of "uniting Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter".

Instead, the two governments will seek to trap Protestant and Catholic workers into their communal identities. They want to maintain the base for right wing politicians by creating institutional structures whereby Protestants are encouraged to look to the British government as their guarantors and Catholics to look to the Southern government as theirs.

By and large the Northern state succeeded in ghettoising the working class. It lowered the horizons of all workers by defining politics in terms of a zero sum game where ever advance for Protestants was a loss for Catholics and vice versa. The new structures being proposed for the North will build on this. Instead of an armed conflict there will be a new more subtle economic sectarianism. Every time jobs are being created or hospitals are being closed down, Catholic and Protestant workers will be encouraged to compete against each other.

Socialists reject this approach. Northern workers have far more in common with each other than divides them. Workers from both religions and none have seen their health service being run down; their wages have been frozen by successive Tory governments; their areas are often blighted by unemployment. Instead of all the talk of different identities, there is also a new mood for looking at a common class interest.

Naturally everyone in Northern Ireland should have a right to express themselves in whatever culture and language they please.

Every socialist should stand up to the bigotry of politicians like Paisley who would seek to impose a British identity on thousands who reject it. But "parity of esteem" can also mean parity of misery when it is established within the rotten and decaying sectarian structures of the North.

What can begin to change the situation in the North is a rising level of class struggle. When Catholic and Protestant workers fight alongside each other their ideas

can start to change. Thousands of Protestant workers can learn that they have far more in common with fellow Catholic workers than with the RUC or Unionist politicians. Catholic workers can also learn to move beyond republican politics to fighting for an Ireland where every worker gains.

But while common class struggle is a necessary condition for breaking sectarianism it is not a sufficient condition. It is vital that a clear socialist alternative is available. That alternative has to show that while it stands for smashing the Northern state, an extension of the present twenty six county state will not remove sectarianism.. Rather it must oppose both Irish states which have grown out of partition and which have spawned conservative, pro-capitalist politics. Only a socialist movement that has no allegiance to any of these states can fully cut through the communal identities. It can genuinely show that it is fighting for a new Ireland: one where, for instance, those who stood up to the Bishops and defended a 14 year old girl in the X case will find common cause with Harland and Wolff workers who struck against the shooting of a Catholic workmate.

Internationalism

“Workers of the world unite”, this was Karl Marx’s great battle cry. For decades the notion of a world working class was scoffed at. It was claimed that workers were only concerned with what happened in their own country.

Today the reality of the global economy impinges on our lives at every moment. Interest rates shoot up because great amounts of money are switched from one end of the globe to another at the flick of a switch. Employers constantly compare ‘unit wage costs’ of Irish workers against other workers. Multi-nationals threaten to move production to other parts of the world if they do not get their way.

It is because the capitalist class operates on a global basis, that every socialist has to be an internationalist. James Connolly put it brilliantly when he argued that a socialist:

“is interested in every revolt of Labour all over the world, for the very individuals against whom that revolt may be directed may—by the wondrous mechanism of the capitalist system—through bonds, shares, national and municipal debts—be the parasites who are sucking his blood also”.

This type of internationalism means more than hoping that the people of South Africa or East Timor win their struggle. Rather it is based on an understanding that the working class is an international class. Workers in Ireland have the same interest as those in America or Africa. This is why when German metal workers, British miners, or African shop workers go on strike socialists argue for solidarity action—ranging from going on strike, to collecting money, to boycotts and messages of support.

As the world is being drawn together, it is also being divided by more and more nation states. Each little patch of earth has its own government and laws, flags and emblems, border guards and barbed wire. If all nations were equal, if their economies were of equal size and their armed forces were of equal strength, internationalism would be easy. All that socialists would have to do is call for workers to unite across the boundaries of nation states in a common struggle against an international ruling class.

But because nations are not all equal, there are many cases where things are not so straight forward. The first capitalist powers in England and Holland used their wealth to build empires. By the end of the 19th century many of the leading European powers, America and Japan had carved out much of the world between them. The colonies were transformed into serving the needs of the rulers of the metropolitan countries. Bolivia supplied tin; Ecuador supplied bananas and South Africa supplied gold and diamonds to their colonisers.

Today, although the formal colonies are gone, the major powers dominate the weaker ones. Unless the smaller powers do as they are told, bank loans are withheld, foreign aid is refused or trade embargoes are imposed. Institutions such as the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund call for ever great sacrifices from the poor of these countries. In the last resort, military force is used to bring these countries into line. Often military pressure is exerted under the cover of the United Nations, whose Security Council is a club of the big world powers.

In brief, a system of imperialism still operates in the world. Not surprisingly, millions of people across the world want to revolt against this system. They despise the fact that their countries are robbed by Western banks or that their oil is stolen by the multi-nationals. They are sick of the humiliation they are expected to endure because they do not have ‘Western values’.

These struggles are not usually working class struggles for socialism. They are struggles for national lib-

eration, struggles where people seek to govern themselves. Today, there are often struggles by people who have achieved their own nation state to prevent the major powers interfering in the policy of that state. Although workers are often involved, they are usually led by middle class or establishment politicians. Sometimes these leaders can have an appalling record and may even have co-operated with imperialism in the past. Such was the case in Saddam Hussein's Iraq during the Gulf War.

What should socialists say in such circumstances? The Irish establishment adopt a most hypocritical attitude. Because of the memory of resistance to colonialism in Ireland, there has been, until recently, a proclaimed policy of neutrality. But the reality is that Ireland is growing closer and closer to the European Union and to the big powers that dominate the UN. So during the Gulf War, despite the policy of neutrality, US war planes were allowed to re-fuel in Shannon.

Socialists should have nothing to do with this type of hypocrisy. In conflicts like the Gulf War or Chechnia, it is not good enough to simply proclaim a 'plague on both your houses'. Both houses are not equal. On one side are the most powerful armed forces in the world. On the other there are poor nations being kept poor by rich nations. And the issues at stake are about preserving the dominance of the main Western powers. In conflicts between America and Cuba, we are not looking at a fight between two equal powers. Rather we are looking at a powerful oppressor and a much weaker, oppressed nation.

Socialists should stand unconditionally with the oppressed against the oppressor, even if the people who run the oppressed country are undemocratic and persecute minorities, as Saddam Hussein persecutes Kurds and Castro persecutes gays. In practice this will mean socialists campaigning for the withdrawal of Western troops, whether or not those troops enter these countries under the guise of UN peace-keepers.

Where the big Western powers win such conflicts,

it strengthens the whole imperialist system and boosts the dominance that the ruling classes have over their workers. But if oppressed countries defeat the imperialist powers, then the whole world system is weakened. This is precisely what happened to the American ruling class in Vietnam. Although socialists had many differences with the Vietnamese National Liberation Front, it was important to stand on their side against the Pentagon and the US war machine.

None of this means that socialists stop publicly criticising the politics and limited perspectives of those who lead national liberation struggles. All nationalists, whether they be the ANC, the PLO or the IRA always seek to come to an accommodation with the world system. We want to fight against imperialism and at the same time develop a socialist opposition to the imperialists and the ruling class or would be ruling class of the oppressed nation.

Internationalism not state capitalism

There has always been a widespread feeling on the left that nationalisation or state ownership of industry is inevitably a socialist measure. Some see state companies in Ireland as more progressive than private companies. Others who believed that the Stalinist states of Eastern Europe were socialist pointed to state control of the economy as proof of their case. In the Third World many leaders of national liberation struggles argued that state ownership meant that former colonies were on the road to socialism.

All three strands of thought are in full scale retreat before the gale of free market 'liberalisation' which blew through the world in the 1980s. The old Workers Party used to seek state ownership but their successors, Democratic Left rarely mention nationalisation. Privatisation is being promoted in Eastern Europe—but those running the new private companies are usually the old Communist Party bosses. In the poorer countries visions of state led economic development

have wilted under the twin blows of recession and debt repayment.

Despite all the talk of privatisation, the state still remains a vital economic force in all these societies. But is it a force for socialism?

A moment's thought tells us that nationalisation cannot be an inherently socialist measure. Hitler's Nazi state was, after all, one of the biggest nationalisers of the twentieth century. The Japanese post war economic miracle was achieved by very close state direction of the economy. Also the third biggest economy in the world is the one composed of the United States Atomic Energy Authority, the space agency NASA and the Pentagon—a massive state owned trust thundering away in the heart of 'free market' America. Not even the most devout advocate of state ownership would claim that these societies are anything but capitalist.

The crucial point here is to ask the right question. Instead of asking, "Does the state own industry?", socialists should ask, "Who controls the state?". Where workers have not taken control of society, nationalisation simply produces state capitalism, not socialism.

James Connolly made the same point in one of his early articles:

"Socialism properly implies above all things the co-operative control by workers of the machinery of production; without this co-operative control the public ownership by the State is not Socialism—it is only state capitalism.

To the cry of the middle class reformers, "make this or that the property of the government", we reply "Yes, in proportion as the workers are ready to make the government their property"

But surely, some argue, it is different when whole economies, like those which existed in Eastern Europe, are taken over by people who call themselves socialists? Surely when national liberation movements, as in Castro's Cuba, take over a society they can move towards socialism in a way that a partial nationalisation in capitalism cannot?

This would be true enough—if the working class had taken power in Eastern Europe or Cuba. But they did not. There were no workers' revolutions in Eastern Europe in 1945, no elected workers' councils, no elected factory committees, no workers' militia. It was the Russian army, not the working class which put the 'communist' leaders in power. Those leaders controlled industry by appointing bosses every bit as unaccountable and exploitative as their Western counterparts.

Cuba, like many other Third World 'socialist' regimes, is different. Here there was an uprising against US imperialism, and every socialist supported it. The Cuban people had every right to chuck out the corrupt, US backed Batista dictatorship. They still have every right to fight the US blockade and the US inspired diplomatic and military pressure which is trying to wreck their society. But all this should not lead us to conclude that Cuba and similar regimes are socialist. The popular rising which overthrew Batista hardly involved the working class, though it initially had the sympathy of many workers. The revolt followed a classic pattern for Third World liberation struggles. It was led by middle class exiles who returned to begin a guerilla war, supported by the peasantry and conducted from the countryside.

Once in power, Castro would have been happy to trade with the market economies. But a Cold War blockade put paid to that option and Castro moved towards greater state ownership.

But state ownership without workers' control does not free a society from the grip of capitalism. Both the Third World and the Eastern European states still had to compete with the West for international markets. They had to borrow from Western banks. More importantly, they had to match the West militarily, tank for tank, missile for missile. Such international pressure determined the domestic relationship between the state and the working class. If Western workers were forced to work harder, then the state capitalist regimes had to force their workers to work harder. If armament manu-

facturers in the West increased productivity, then the state owned arms manufacturers had to follow. The states in Eastern Europe performed and those in the Third World perform all the same functions that the capitalist class and its states do in Western societies.

Only when workers democratically control society will we have socialism. Socialism cannot be built unless workers control the factories and the political institutions.

This does not mean, however, that there are not important occasions where socialists support nationalisation. But we should judge it using the same yardstick that we use when we ask "Is a society socialist or not?". We should ask "Does this increase the confidence of workers, their living standards and their ability to organise, or not?" So socialists resist the selling off of the NHS in Northern Ireland or Britain. We oppose the privatisation of industries like Telecom because this is linked to an attack on workers conditions. But the key for us always is how does any restructuring affect union rights.

This perspective that state ownership in itself is not the same as socialism is crucial to understanding the modern world. Whereas many others became demoralised by the collapse of Eastern Europe in the 1989 revolutions, genuine socialists supported the revolts against the old Stalinist system. While supporting the revolts, it was necessary to argue that the market would bring no improvement to these countries. Eastern Europe shows that neither state capitalism nor the free market will stop the attacks on workers. What is required is a shift to workers control of production in a society which produce for need and not greed. That is what real socialism is about.

What is a socialist revolution?

Workers power

The capitalist state is, in the words of Marx and Engels, 'a mechanism for forcibly holding down the exploited class in conditions of oppression' and that is why 'the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes'.

That is one reason why a revolution is necessary. It has to clear away the old state and replace it with a workers' state. But what would a workers' state be like? Where would it come from? History provides us with some ideas. In past struggles we can find attempts to set up workers' states. These attempts usually started from organisations built to fight the old order and then, when that order was shaken, these same bodies organised its overthrow. After the revolution these organisations grew still further to take on the tasks of running society. So a revolution isn't just a bolt from the blue. A revolution is much more than the moment of insurrection, it is also a process.

Look at what happened during the Russian revolution of 1905. A strike committee started by organising against print employers, ignited more general resistance and became a workers' council involving all the different sections of the working class. It then challenged the government for the power to run society.

The Paris Commune of 1871 was a similar attempt to set up a workers' state. Marx left this description of

how it worked:

"The Commune was formed of the municipal councillors, chosen by universal suffrage in the various wards of Paris, responsible and revocable at any time. The majority of its members were naturally working men, or the acknowledged representatives of the working class ... The police, which until then had been the instrument of the government was at once stripped of its political attributes, and turned into the responsible and at all times revocable instrument of the Commune ... From the members of the Commune downwards, public service had to be done at workmen's wages. The privileges and the representation allowances of the high dignitaries of state disappeared along with the dignitaries themselves ... Having once got rid of the standing army and the police, the instruments of the physical force of the old government, the Commune proceeded at once to break the instrument of spiritual suppression, the power of the priests ... The judicial functionaries lost their sham independence ... they were thenceforward to be elective, responsible and revocable".

This pattern of workers opposing the system and then establishing their own organisations to start running society has been repeated in many countries. The Irish War of Independence was a revolt against the British Empire but there were also elements which sought workers power. During the general strike in Ireland in 1920, workers councils sprang up. One journalist was in Kilmallock, East Limerick:

"A visit to the local Town Hall ... commandeered for the purpose of issuing permits —and one was struck by the absolute recognition of the soviet system—in deed if not in name. At one table sat a school teacher dispensing bread permits, at another a trade union official controlling food supply, at a third a railwayman controlling coal, at a fourth a creamery clerk distributing butter tickets .. all working smoothly"

The workers' councils which emerged in Russia in 1917 were the most advanced form of working class

self organisation. But the essence was the same — complete democracy in all areas of life, the removal of special pay and status for representatives, all representatives, from judges to militia officers, to be recalled instantly if they did not carry out the wishes of those who voted for them.

This is very different from the capitalist state. Instead of an instrument wielded by a tiny rich minority to hold down the majority, it is the democratic organisation of the majority designed to prevent the old ruling class regaining its power. But as soon as the threat of counter revolution is beaten back and the power of the old ruling class broken even this, the most democratic state in history, will be unnecessary. Engels writes:

"As soon as there is no longer a class to be held in subjection any longer, as soon as class domination and the struggle for individual existence based on anarchy of production existing up to now are eliminated ... there is nothing left to repress, nothing necessitating a special repressive force, a state ... The interference of the state power in social relations becomes superfluous in one sphere after another, and then it dies away of itself.. The state is not abolished, it withers away".

A socialist revolution will also start the process of transforming the economy. Capitalism glories in the idea of a 'free market'. Firms produce what they want, when they want. Their only aim is to make a profit. If that means that a profit can be made out of giant fluffy dice to hang from the rear-view mirror of a car, rather than from food for the starving, then fluffy dice it is. Nuclear power stations or more schools? It depends on what makes a profit. But even when capitalists think they've got a profit making item, they can't be sure. Perhaps six other firms have all had the same idea. So to add to the waste of producing fluffy dice, we may well end up with fluffy dice that no one will buy. Once that happens jobs will be lost and then people will have even less money to spend.

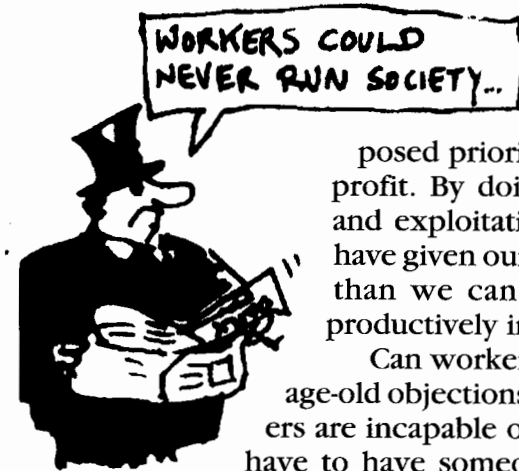
To overcome this chaos, production needs to be planned. The idea of planning is very unfashionable

these days. People think it has to mean the grey uniformity of the old Stalinist states. But these were economies that were geared to the arms race and there was no planning for human need. Workers had no control over production and distribution, yet this is the first requirement of socialist planning.

Some people go on to argue that planning is impossible because the economy is far too complex. They forget that great big chunks of the economy are already very closely planned. Consider what happens when your food packages are run over the bar code reader at the supermarket. A message is sent to the stockroom computer to show how fast stocks are declining. This information is sent on to the warehouse so replacement stocks can be sent. The warehouse stock figures are aggregated by head office so that they can inform their wholesale suppliers. The wholesalers plan how much they want from farmers and importers. The whole process, from the farmers' field to the supermarket shelf, is a series of planned decisions. It is ready made for the kind of planning that a socialist society would need. It doesn't work under capitalism because of the nature of this planning. Dunnes Stores has a plan—but so do Superquinn and Quinnsworth—plans designed to wreck each other's markets.

Neither would replacing these competing companies with one democratically agreed on plan reduce diversity and choice—after all, virtually the same goods are on sale in all these supermarkets. Indeed the choice of products could be significantly increased just by using resources that are now squandered by useless duplication across the different supermarket chains. And in the choice of which brand of, say, chocolate biscuits to produce supply and demand might well have a role. Socialists don't want to, even if we could, plan all the details of consumer purchase.

But what we could do is to vote on how our large scale spending priorities are to be ordered. Would we vote for more hospitals or more weapons? More houses or more schools? They won't always be easy choices.



There will be a lot of debate but they will be our choices not the imposed

priorities of a market made for profit. By doing away with the waste and exploitation of capitalism we will have given ourselves far more resources than we can possibly imagine using productively in this society.

Can workers run society? One of the age-old objections to socialism is that workers are incapable of running society. 'People have to have someone to tell them what to do', goes the time-worn refrain. One look at the way our society actually runs, as opposed to the way the bosses and the media tell us it runs, shows that nothing could be further from the truth.

The myth is that if it weren't for bosses and managers everything would grind to a halt. But workers know their jobs, and collectively they know the whole production process far better than managers. When the ESB ran a small competition some years ago for ideas on how to make improvements in efficiency, they came up with so many suggestions that they made savings of £10 million. The creativity of workers is shown also in the way the companies try to tap their enthusiasm and knowledge through Japanese style 'quality circles'. Of course these are methods of increasing the rate of exploitation—but they are a distorted recognition that workers know more about production than the management.

More often than not any specialised knowledge that management have about how things are produced was acquired while they were workers, not after they became managers. Usually what makes such people suitable managers is their willingness to sack people, cut wages and generally boss people around. This, and not anything useful, is certainly what they are taught on management training courses.

By contrast, there is no factory or office in the

world that can run if the workers stop work. No management group has ever produced a car, collected the rubbish or run a bus service if workers refuse to do their job. Some people will agree to all this, but then object that, even though workers may be able to run their own local workplace very well without the boss, they

couldn't manage the more complex task of making the whole society work. How could workers decide whether we should build roads or railways, co-ordinate health-care and education, or decide between the production of food and luxury goods? Surely, the argument goes, the bosses are necessary for these big decisions?

Strangely enough, bosses and managers don't really decide these things even now. How do we know?

Because they are always telling us that they don't. When a factory is closed, Ministers and managers are the first to say that they aren't responsible—it's 'the market' that decides. If millions are spent in propping up currencies or interest rates rise, the government again tell us that 'there is nothing they can do—they had no alternative'.

In a sense, the bosses and the ministers are, for once, telling the truth. They are the servants of the market. Of course they always make sure that they are the last to be damaged if the market turns against them. It is always our wages, jobs or conditions that go first and their job is to make sure it stays that way. But once the system of market competition and profit making is up and running, everyone in the system has to live by its rules.

That's why if workers want to be able to run soci-



ety they have to take it over all at once, not just one factory or office at a time. Only by taking over the whole society can workers control the relations between the different firms as well as the set-up inside the firm. If we don't take over the whole thing then the competition between the firms forces us to behave like bosses inside the firm. This is why when workers in the Crannac furniture factory in Navan and Carragiline Pottery in Cork took over their firms—they had to sack fellow workers and cut back on wages.

If we did take the whole society over, would there be a better way of organising things than the market?

Many people would be tempted to say we could hardly do worse than the market. We wouldn't let millions rot on the dole, spend billions on nuclear weapons while the health and education systems across the world crumble. We would hardly waste millions more on advertising while a quarter of the population of Ireland live below the poverty line. These kind of priorities are set by a ruling class whose only concerns are profit and having a big enough army, police and prison system to defend their profits. Our priorities would be decided democratically. We would meet together in workers' councils and vote on economic priorities, just as we now elect shop stewards and union officers, after debate and discussion. Since we would control the factories, offices, hospitals and schools, we would see that our decisions got carried out. We would implement what we had been decided. That's why workers' power would be so different from a Labour government under capitalism, where all the good promises are broken because the rich who own the newspapers, control the economy and run the state sabotage them.

When we decide what to produce and implement these decisions, when everyone can see what is happening in every part of the society, then all the pent up energies, unused skills and cramped imagination of workers can be set free on the collective task of building a society without exploitation, oppression and the rule of the tiny few.

Why we need a revolutionary party

Party and class

If the conservative dream were to suddenly come true and every worker went along with pro-capitalist ideas, if there were never any strikes or protests, if no one ever answered back to the boss, then there would be no point in organising a socialist party.

We would be living in the kind of world George Orwell described in his book, 1984: a cowed and submissive working class, afraid even to think a subversive thought, constantly monitored by Big Brother. In such a world the possibility of resistance, let alone revolution, would be reduced to nothing.

Similarly, there would be no need for a socialist party if the anarchist dream of spontaneous class struggle came true. If, without organisation, planning or strategy, workers across the face of industry were suddenly to take action, there would be no need for socialist organisation.

But real life is never as bad as the conservative dream and never as good as the anarchist dream. In reality, working class struggle is always uneven, never uniformly bad or uniformly good. Some factories, offices or industries strike while others remain at work. Some within a workplace will vote for a strike, while others will not. Some workers are revolutionary socialists, some good militants, while others support Fianna Fail or the Unionist Party.

Most of the time revolutionary socialists will be a minority, as will hardline right wingers or anti-union figures. Most workers, most of the time, will believe in

a mixture of ideas. They may want change—but think that ‘human nature’ will stop that change happening. Perhaps they will want to strike, but worry about breaking the anti-union laws. On any given issue they may be swayed by the right wing elements in the union or workplace, or they may be convinced by the arguments of the socialists.

A revolutionary socialist party is an organisation which groups together the workers who want to fight so that they can have the maximum chance of winning the majority of their fellow workers to taking action.

To stand the best chance of doing this, the militant minority will need to be clear and confident about their arguments and their strategy. They will need to know what is happening in other parts of the country where their tactics have already proved successful or where those of the right wing have already led to failure. They will need to back up their arguments with leaflets and with a newspaper that reports their actions and discussions.

They will want to know their enemy—what the government and the bosses are planning, what the employers’ strategy is, whether they are divided among themselves or not. Many will want to know what the leaders on our side are up to and how to counter any arguments designed to delay the struggle. Many will want to connect their struggles with others who are fighting and from whom they may be able to get solidarity. Many will need to know about the international experience of workers’ struggles and about the history of the workers movement—what led to victory and what led to defeat in the past.

All this requires socialist organisation. It requires meetings for education and discussion, to hammer out tactics and to organise solidarity. It requires a paper and other publications that report and analyse the struggle, which provide ideas and theory. It requires active organisation to bring all this experience to bear on the class struggle. It means organising to unite the struggles of our class, just as the employers and the govern-

ment unite their class in struggle. In short, it requires a socialist party.

Such a party cannot just express the common views held by most workers. If it did it would simply reflect the contradictory ideas that many workers hold. You can't win an argument with someone if you are confused about your ideas. Only if the party is composed of those who are working towards a clear strategy can it hope to present a forceful enough case to win others who, at first, only partially agree with it.

This sort of a party has to be very different from a Labour Party. The Labour Party purposely is not interested in raising workers' consciousness and willingness to fight, merely in winning elections. It is not going to challenge racist or sexist ideas. Instead it will blur and fudge and try to adapt to the arguments that are promoted by the media. A party designed to organise action cannot suffer such confusion. It must agree its principles and go out and argue for them even if, at first, it is a minority.

A socialist party shouldn't stand aloof from the class either. It has to be involved in the struggle wherever workers or the oppressed are fighting back. It shouldn't preach or assume that it knows all the answers. It should try to give a lead but it should also listen. Workers who enter into struggle are tremendously creative and a party that does not listen and learn could never lead a revolution. Lenin and the Bolsheviks, for example, didn't invent the idea of a workers' council, Russian workers did that themselves in the 1905 revolution. But Lenin and his party remembered the slogan 'All Power to the Soviets' and made it their own in the 1917 revolution.

A revolutionary party is part of the class, but doesn't dissolve itself into the class; tries to lead, but doesn't preach. It is the memory of the class, an educator and an organiser.

The way a socialist party organises itself reflects these tasks. It has to be fundamentally democratic because otherwise it could not learn from the class strug-

gle. If its members cannot argue what they think should be done openly and with confidence, they will never take their experiences into the party. The party would simply become a passive sect that makes comments on what happens—but it could never give a lead. Similarly there cannot be a secretive 'armed wing' which operates as the real leadership. Republican organisations that have been built on these lines can pursue long guerrilla campaigns—but they are not formed to mobilise huge numbers of workers.

The freedom of discussion inside a socialist party means that an effective unity is built between its members. If members have arguments and discussions with each other they can learn from their own experience why a particular line of action makes sense. But unless at the end of such discussion, a policy is decided which all party members carry out—unless there is centralism—there is no real democracy. A discussion which is followed by every member simply carrying on regardless of whether they are in a minority or majority is not democratic. Indeed it is not even an organisation, since the whole purpose of an organisation is to join together to pursue commonly agreed objectives.

This form of democratic centralism has nothing to do with the image of the bureaucratic, top down style of leadership of Stalinist parties. It is also very different to the way a Labour Party organises itself. The Labour Party allows some freedom of debate and discussion—but these are not followed by united action. Delegates to the Labour Party conference can pass very left wing resolutions—but the Labour leadership ignores them. Labour Party members may oppose water charges or protest at health cuts—but the leadership is not subject to their control and operates regardless of the wishes of the members.

Labour Parties are bureaucratic centralist parties because the parliamentary wing and a central bureaucracy make the key decisions. They behave like this because they seek to manage capitalism while main-

taining an electoral base among workers. The party has to allow its leadership have the 'freedom' to come to terms with the rich and impose hardship on their own supporters.

Lenin, by contrast, showed what was required from a party that set out to smash capitalism. He said that the working class "does not recognise unity in action without the freedom to discuss and criticise". That is why he described democratic centralism as "freedom of discussion and criticism" followed by "unity in action".

What should a revolutionary do?

How does a militant minority of workers, organised in a revolutionary party, influence other workers who are not revolutionaries?

The most important thing is that revolutionaries must be involved in the struggles of the day, be they strikes, rent boycotts, overtime bans, student occupations, right to choose lobbies, anti-war pickets or whatever. It is here, where people are already beginning to fight, that there is the best chance of people developing socialist ideas. In such struggles socialists must aim to be the most active and inventive fighters. People will take revolutionary politics seriously if they see that it is of practical help in explaining and aiding their own struggles.

So socialists must agitate and organise—suggest a way forward, point out the best methods of getting solidarity, build the confidence and involvement of all those affected by the issue in hand. This will often mean arguing with others—union officials, Labour councillors, the established leaders of tenants' associations or whatever.

If this is done in a fraternal and sensitive way people will listen. Even if you lose the argument you will group around you the people who most want to fight.

But as well as talking to people about the immediate struggle, revolutionaries should always raise more general issues. We should point out how this particular struggle fits into the wider battle against the government and the system. We should draw people's attention to international issues and to past struggle of the

working class.

A paper, like Socialist Worker, is invaluable in all this. It connects different struggles with one another. It links individual struggles with the way the whole system runs. It fights for anti-racist and anti-sexist ideas. It helps to organise the thousands of people who want revolutionary change in Ireland. This is why every socialist should take a few papers to sell so that they create a network of supporters around them. Similarly, encouraging people to come to the meetings of a revolutionary organisation will help them to connect the struggle in which they are involved with wider socialist politics.

In doing all this there are two dangers which revolutionaries should avoid. The first is the danger of just going along with the ideas of the workers around you. This is easy to do. All the pressure from trade union officials, from workers who don't feel confident to fight or who don't see the connection between their section of the class and other workers will be in this direction. They will say: 'Don't be so militant', 'Slow things down a bit', 'Let's do things by the book'.

But in the battle against conservatism in the class, revolutionaries must be careful not to run too far ahead of the most militant workers. The point of organising the militant minority into a party is that they can lead the majority, not so they can rush off on their own and proclaim their revolutionary purity.

This is why revolutionaries always seek common activity with other workers. We link arms on the picket line, even if the other strikers have racist or sexist ideas. And in the common struggle, especially if we succeed in stopping the scabs, we will stand every chance of convincing people that racism and sexism weaken the struggle and allow the bosses to divide us.

Not to link arms against a common enemy would be sectarian. Not to argue against racism or sexism would be an unprincipled retreat which will weaken both our party and the struggle.

Finally, revolutionaries should always urge others

to join their organisation. A stronger party means a stronger class. Consider, if fewer people had joined Socialist Worker there would not have been so many who were able to organise demonstrations against the Gulf War or stand up for women's rights. There would not be a network of people who were willing to organise solidarity for workers in struggle. Also in a situation where Labour and Democratic Left were betraying their own supporters there would be a danger of more demoralisation unless there was a viable alternative.

Today Irish society is at a crossroads. Many want to end the situation where they are pushed on to low paying jobs while bosses like Goodman and O'Reilly make ever increasing profits. They are tired of a situation where the bishops and small groups of bigots of the clerical right suppress women's rights. After decades of conflict in the North, there is a feeling that workers have more in common than that which divides us.

The anger and desire for change is there. It will take organisation and determination to bring it.

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